

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KATHMANDU 000363

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR SA/INS

LONDON FOR POL/RIEGEL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KIRF](#) [SOCI](#) [NP](#)

SUBJECT: NEPALI GOVERNMENT MOVES TO REGULATE MADRASAS

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: A notice from the Home Ministry announcing that private Muslim schools must register with local authorities has drawn criticism from the Muslim community. Some Muslim leaders view the measure as an empty gesture, probably performed at the behest of the Indian government, that will do nothing to improve the quality of education available to Muslim youth. One Muslim educator warned that the lack of educational opportunities may further marginalize youth in his community, making them potentially more sympathetic to extremist movements like Maoism. End summary.

MADRASAS MUST REGISTER

2. (U) On January 31 the Cabinet decided that Muslim religious schools, or madrasas, will have to register with local District Administration and Education Offices and supply information about their funding sources in order to operate. According to the Cabinet's official announcement, the measure was taken to ensure the "quality and transparency" in the schools' operation. On Feb. 1 the Home Ministry followed up the Cabinet decision with an announcement that all madrasas must register with their respective District Administration Offices by March 13.

3. (U) Baikuntha Das Shrestha, Joint Secretary at the Ministry of Education and Sports, told poloff that the measure, which will also affect private Sanskrit schools, is not intended to single out madrasas for scrutiny. Nor should the timing of the announcement, which occurred the week before Nepal's Home Secretary met his Indian counterpart in New Delhi to discuss counter-terrorism cooperation, be considered significant, Shrestha said. In fact, the measure figured as part of implementing regulations now being drafted for an amendment to the Education Bill passed during the last session of Parliament. Shrestha estimated there are approximately 300-350 madrasas operating in Nepal, most of them concentrated in the southern lowland Terai districts along the Indian border.

4. (U) Madrasas and other private schools now operate without oversight by the central government. Most of the textbooks used in madrasas come from India, according to Shrestha, and are written in Urdu. The amendment will now require madrasas and other private schools to submit curricula for non-religious academic subjects, such as mathematics, science, and Nepali, to the National Curriculum Council for approval, Shrestha said. There is so far no effort to regulate, standardize, or scrutinize the credentials of teachers in madrasas, most of whom come from India.

MUSLIM LEADERS WANT GON AID

5. (SBU) Muslim leaders contacted said they were unhappy with the measure--especially since apparently no one in their community was consulted before it was issued. Salim Mian Ansari, a former Minister and current head of Nepal's largest Muslim social welfare organization, was quoted in the press as charging the Government of Nepal (GON) acted under pressure from India and the U.S. (In a subsequent conversation with poloff, he amended his accusatory remarks to include only India.) He said he has long pressed the GON to help madrasas to modernize. If the GON is truly concerned about how Muslim schools operate, he argued, it should provide them some funding to update their science and mathematics curricula. Since the new

registration requirement does nothing to improve the quality of madrasa education or to set standards for their operation, Ansari concluded the measure was adopted only as a window-dressing gesture to appease India.

16. (SBU) Ansari's views were echoed by Syed Mohammed Habibullah, a political science professor at Tribhuvan University. The low quality of education available to Muslim students at madrasas limits their professional opportunities, ensuring that they remain marginalized and out of mainstream Nepali society, he asserted. If the GON continues to fail to remove some of the inequities the Muslim community faces and makes no effort to integrate them more fully into society, disadvantaged Muslim youth could become willing recruits for extremist movements, like the Maoists, that promise social equality. Habibullah waved off poloff's question about the popularity of Muslim extremist movements with local communities; he said he regards the possible appeal of Maoism as the greater threat.

17. (SBU) Like Ansari, Habibullah viewed the new requirement as having little or no impact, for either better or worse, on the madrasas' operations. That the notice announcing the registration requirement was issued by the Home Ministry, rather the Education Ministry, casts suspicion on the motivation behind the new requirement, Habibullah said. The notice was issued without any prior consultation with the Muslim community, he observed, which raises questions about the GON's intent, especially since community members like him have long urged the GON to take a more active role in their improvement. For example, Habibullah said he has approached the GON about forming a madrasa board, with participation from the Muslim community, to oversee and upgrade the operation of the schools.

COMMENT

18. (SBU) Requiring madrasas to register may help the GON get a better handle on how many are operating within its borders, but will do little by itself to address Muslim community concerns about improving the quality of the education they offer. The GON may lack the resources to help address these concerns but can do a better job of consulting the community on decisions that affect them. The gap between the Ministry of Education's official explanation for the new requirement and the perception within the Muslim community of underlying ulterior motives points to a fundamental lack of communication the GON would do well to address.

Malinowski